

J. Bayly 1800

CHRISTIAN COMMUNION.



THE MINISTERS

Of the Denomination of PARTICULAR BAPTISTS.

Assembled in Association at HALIFAX.

On the 30th and 31st of May, 1798.

SEND CHRISTIAN SALUTATION TO THE SEVERAL
CHURCHES THEY REPRESENT.

MEETING AT

Ackrington,	Gilderfome,	Rawden,
Bacup,	Halifax,	Rochdale,
Barnoldswick,	Hebden-Bridge,	Sabden,
Blackburn,	Leeds,	Salendine Nook,
Clough-Fold,	Manchester,	Sutton,
Colne,	Masbro',	and
Cowling-Hill,	Preston,	Wainsgate.

DEAR BRETHREN,

THE Author of our being has implanted in us a strong inclination for society. Man partakes of this inclination in common with the brutal creation, but his capacities and powers for the enjoyment of it are much superior.

It is more necessary to his happiness, than to that of any other order of created beings with which we are acquainted. He is possessed of a soul capable of the highest cultivation. He is endowed with intellectual powers, which evidently shew that he was designed to associate with his kind, for the most important purposes. Without society this world, even as it was seen by our first parent in paradise, would be but a wilderness. We depend for most of the comforts of life upon one another. The high, the low, the rich and the poor, all feel the necessity of social connections.

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But, though this disposition may be productive of good, we must allow that, through the depravity of human nature, it has been the cause of much evil. It is an awful truth, that the natural propensity of mankind is to wickedness, and that, instead of encouraging one another in what is good, they in general harden one another in their crimes. If we follow the multitude, it will be "to do evil." The history of the world, whether in its barbarous or more civilized state, is but too great a confirmation of this lamentable truth.

There is much communion amongst men. Multitudes are crowding together in the downward road. They unite in bodies, according to the different vices to which they are most addicted. Here you see the man of pleasure, surrounded by the jovial throng, he spares no pains to form an assemblage of such persons as suit his disposition. There you see the man who values riches above all other objects, eager to unite with those from whom he is likely to gain some advantage, and quite happy when he thinks he has formed a good connection. But if you turn your eyes to Wisdom's path, you will discern but here and there a traveller. You will see few of those strong indications of pleasure in each other's company which you observe in the former, and little of that eager desire to communicate their sentiments. Christians live too much like strangers to one another. The children of this world are in this, as in many other respects, wiser than the children of light. They certainly act more consistently.

These and other circumstances, that might be mentioned, render the subject proposed for our present consideration very important. Christian Communion is not valued or improved as it ought to be. We therefore call for your serious attention, while we endeavour to point out your obligations to this duty—to enumerate some of the advantages of it—and to suggest some means of promoting it.—God grant that a blessing may accompany our feeble efforts!

Our obligations to this duty will appear, if we consider, that it is the tendency of religion in general, and of Christianity in particular, to promote communion.

Under the different dispensations in which God has revealed himself, religion has always induced its professors to withdraw from the unbelieving world, and to unite with each other. Even when society was in its infancy, and many reasons might have rendered it desirable for all to associate together, it appears that the religious posterity of Seth had little or no connection with the profligate descendants of Cain. They are styled, in scripture, the sons of God, and they, as such, enjoyed communion with him and with one another.

Abraham, the father of the faithful, at the divine command, left his native place to go to a land to which he was a stranger, that he might not be contaminated by the vices of his forefathers. The Almighty fixed upon his descendants as his peculiar people, among whom the true religion should be preserved till the coming of the Messiah. They were required to assemble frequently for religious
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purposes; and the book of Psalms evidently shews, that there was not only fervent piety towards God, but intimate communion amongst good men, under that dispensation. The daily oblations, the observance of the sabbath, and the frequent journeys they took together to Jerusalem, must have tended to promote social religion. As a nation, it is true, they often apostatized from God, yet, in the darkest periods, there were some among them who feared him, and spake often one to another.

But though, in reading the Old Testament, we shall find many intimations, that good men in those early ages held communion with each other, we must observe that christianity, which was designed to be more generally diffused in the world, has a more particular tendency to promote it.

Whether we consider the nature of the doctrines of christianity—the example of its Founder—the spirit and disposition it inspires—or the duties it enjoins, it will appear to be admirably calculated to answer this end.

Such is the nature of the gospel, that, when rightly understood, it must cause the mind to expand in generous feelings, and in goodwill to mankind. Here we behold the most wonderful display of disinterested, unmerited love, “God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son.”—Can you, brethren, consider this passage, and not feel the force of the apostle’s appeal? “If God so loved us, we ought likewise to love one another.” Were salvation obtained by our own righteousness, we might, in the persuasion of the superiority of our own attainments, look down with contempt upon our fellow-creatures, and say, Stand by, we are holier than you. But boasting is here excluded: we are all guilty before God; and if we are saved, it must be by grace alone.

Love enters into the spirit of christianity, and the more you contemplate its nature, the more you will feel of that divine principle, both towards God and your fellow-christians. The wisdom, which cometh from above, is pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.

Review the conduct of our divine Master, and you will find that he exemplified and enforced social religion. Though he was the Son of God, and declared himself positively to be so, he did not disdain to call us, worms of the dust, his brethren. He did not command his attendants to keep at an humble distance; we see nothing morose or reserved in his character and deportment. He did not, like John the Baptist, retire into the wilderness. He associated familiarly with mankind. Multitudes flocked to him wherever he came: but besides his occasional hearers, there were some who had relinquished their former pursuits, for the purpose of intercourse with him and each other. They followed him, as his companions, wherever he went. After he had retired from the crowd, we frequently find him conversing with them, and explaining the parables to them. He bore with their simplicity; he answered

swered their inquiries with the greatest readiness, and shewed, on all occasions, the most affectionate regard for them. Through the whole course of his public life, and particularly at the close of it, when he delivered his farewell discourses, he exemplified that kind disposition which we ought to feel for each other. He hath left us an example of Christian communion.

The new commandment which he gave to his disciples, and to all his followers, was, "that they should love one another," and in this is certainly included the communion of christians. What is communion but the expression of this love? Wherever love exists, it will evidence itself in this way. That same command, therefore, on which Christ laid so much stress, which teaches us to love our brother, equally requires us to maintain communion with him.

We might remind you of many other duties which Christ inculcated, all of which tend to promote communion. What are the dispositions of mind particularly necessary? Is it necessary to lay aside anger, wrath, malice, bitterness? These are positively prohibited by the Christian Lawgiver. Is it necessary to cultivate a forgiving spirit—humility, meekness, disinterestedness? These dispositions Christ required of his followers, and was himself a most bright example of them. So much do they enter into the spirit of christianity, that to put them on is to put on Christ. In our prayers we are commanded to say *Our Father*, to teach us, that we ought to be concerned not only for ourselves, but for others. If the disciples on any occasion manifested an unsociable, selfish disposition, he reproved them for it, and shewed them the impropriety of their conduct, as his followers. He assured them, that if they would be truly great, it must be by acts of kindness and condescension, not disdaining the meanest offices. When *Peter* put the inquiry to him, "How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him, until seven times?" Christ says unto him, "No, until seven times, but until seventy times seven." Sometimes he warns them not to give offence to the meanest of those who believed on him. These circumstances, if properly considered, shew how essentially communion enters into the spirit of the christian religion. Of such importance are these social tempers, that without them we give no sufficient evidence of our being the real followers of the meek, the lowly, the compassionate Jesus. By this, he says, shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye love one another.

As the nature of christianity gradually disclosed itself, its tendency to promote the disposition we are now speaking of appeared more and more.

The distinction between Jews and gentiles, which had been very great, subsided; it was declared, that he that feareth God, of every nation is accepted of him. The veil of separation was now rent in twain. In Christ Jesus all have access by one Spirit to the Father. Though once strangers and foreigners, they are now fellow-citizens of the saints, and of the household of God.

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The relation, in consequence, subsisting between christians, implies the closest connection, and sets forth our obligations to cultivate christian communion. However they may have differed in other respects, they now become brethren; it is their duty and privilege to act to each other as such. If Christ is the vine, they are the branches, joined to him and to each other. If he is the corner-stone, they individually belong to the same building, and ought to be cemented one to another. They are, to use a stronger figure, members of the same body, of which Christ is the head. There ought, therefore, to be a fellow-feeling, since if one member suffer, all the members suffer with it. There is a kind of fellowship between all real christians,—a fellowship of interests, of comforts, of privileges, and duties. They are partakers of the same hope of the gospel, and of the same common salvation; objects of the same love, renewed by the same spirit, heirs of the same promises, adopted into the same family; they are, in short, all one in Christ.—What are the ideas, brethren, that we ought to affix to these terms, which are so frequently made use of by the inspired writers, when describing the disciples of Christ? Are not these strong expressions designed to set forth that communion which should not only subsist between them and Christ, but between one another?

The apostles of Christ, who had every opportunity of studying the spirit of christianity, and the example of their divine Master, were equally solicitous to promote the same disposition.

They did not satisfy themselves with preaching the word to all that came to hear, but, wherever they laboured with success, they established religious societies for the edification of the new converts. Over these they watched with the tenderest care, and particularly explained to them their duties to each other. For a proof of this we need but refer you to the epistles they wrote to the infant churches. Never were the duties of christians to each other more beautifully set forth than in these writings of the apostles. By the love of God, by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, by a regard for the divine honour, and the prosperity of the church, exhortations to unity are enforced.

The apostle *Paul*, who was taught the nature of the gospel by a special revelation from heaven, breathes, throughout his epistles, the spirit of christian communion. Scarcely can we open any part of them, but we must perceive that tender concern for those to whom he writes, which is the result of this amiable spirit. He begins and ends his letters with the most affectionate salutations. Whatever subject he has been discussing in the former part of his epistles, he uniformly gives them, towards the close, directions relating to their conduct to each other. He exhorts them to walk in love as Christ hath loved them; to be attentive not only to their own interests, but to those of others; to forbearance with the weak and ignorant; not to please themselves; to participate in the afflictions and comforts of others; to weep with those that weep,

weep, and to rejoice with those that rejoice; to avoid contentions and disputes, keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. But to enumerate all the passages that might be adduced to this purpose, would be to transcribe a considerable part of the epistles themselves. In this respect the different writers all agree. The epistles of *Peter*, and of *John*, the beloved disciple, all breathe the same spirit, and all conduce to the same end. Had we no other evidence of the tendency of christianity to promote communion, these epistles are more than sufficient.

In the history of the primitive church, we shall see the best comment on the exhortations with which the New Testament abounds. From the short account given us in the Acts of the Apostles, as well as from the epistles, it is evident that christians, in those early ages, were most intimately united together. They not only attended the public assemblies, but, as the sacred historian informs us, they continued stedfast in the apostles' doctrine, and in fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayer. It appears that though many of the converts had come to Jerusalem from remote parts, and would otherwise soon have returned, they continued there a considerable time, not only that they might hear the word, but enjoy the fellowship of believers. The sweetest harmony reigned amongst them. They were united in the pursuit of divine truth. One heart and one soul animated the whole multitude of them that believed. O happy society! How pleasant, how delightful, the communion of saints, while they thus walked in the fear of the Lord, in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, and were edified.

Neither the violence of persecution, nor the ridicule of the world, could induce them to relinquish that fellowship which was so dear to them. Whether they were dismissed from the tribunal, or miraculously released out of prison, they immediately went to their own company, whom they generally found praying for them.— They not only met on the first day of the week, but, for some time at least, they united every day in the acts of communion. They were daily in the temple, probably in some retired part of it, where they assembled to offer up prayers and supplications to the Almighty. The multitude of them that believed were together, and engaged in the exercises of religion with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God.

The fellowship of primitive christians extended to a participation not only of spiritual but of temporal blessings. They sold their possessions, and laid the money at the apostles' feet, that it might be at their disposal. Their minds were so much taken up with religion, and the fellowship of christians, that they were willing to forego any attention to their secular affairs and worldly interests. They went from house to house, as convenience suited, and, no doubt, their common repasts were seasoned with the most edifying conversation. The frequency of the administration of the Lord's supper tended greatly to diffuse harmony and friendship among them.

them. This ordinance was sometimes followed by their feasts of charity, which seem to have been principally designed to promote a sociable disposition among christians. At the conclusion of the public meetings, they testified their love to each other, by collections for the poor saints in their own society, and in other places. Such was the conduct of the professors of our holy religion in primitive times. Among the virtues which distinguished them, there were none for which they were more remarkable than their regard for each other, whether present or absent, and the unaffected simplicity of their conduct.

From what has been said, we may certainly infer, that the communion of saints is of divine institution; that as it is a principle implanted in our nature, to associate with our fellow-creatures, christianity is so far from repressing these feelings, that it refines and exalts them: this appears from the nature of its doctrine, the example of its Author, the duties it requires, the general exhortations of the apostles, and the lives of the primitive christians.—

Were it necessary to produce further proofs of this, we might observe, that, in giving up ourselves to the church of Christ, we lay ourselves under obligations to maintain christian communion. Many persons are apt to think, that if they join a society of christians, attend the ministry of the word, and partake of the ordinances, they do all that is necessary. These they do merely to silence the upbraidings of their consciences; they have no due sense of the importance of the fellowship of saints. But was this the spirit of primitive christians? Does our Saviour call for nothing more at our hands, as his professing followers? Are there no social duties incumbent upon us? We leave you to answer these inquiries, after having considered what has been before suggested. It is true, one important end of church-fellowship is, that we may unitedly partake of the ordinances; but we ought to remember that they are but means. The principal design is, that, as heirs of the same promises, we may promote one another's welfare; we engage, as occasion may require, to instruct, to warn, to comfort each other. Conscious of our own personal weakness and inability to resist our spiritual enemies, we unite together for mutual assistance. Such a spirit *has* manifested itself in the church of Christ, but, alas! how little of it appears at present. May not the inquiry be justly put to many professors of christianity, "What do ye more than others?"—As members of a christian society, do we cultivate a fellow-feeling for each other? Do we warn, reprove, and exhort with all long-suffering? Do we feel a particular interest in the welfare of those to whom we are united? Do we weep with them in their distresses, as well as rejoice with them in their consolations? Would to God that more of this disposition were evident!

We might likewise observe, that, as members of religious societies, it is incumbent upon us to exercise those talents which God has given us. "As every man has received the gift, so let him
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minister." Christian communion calls forth these talents into exercise, and no man, however inconsiderable his abilities, ought to plead an excuse. As in the human body the members have different offices, some more honourable, others of an inferior nature, so in the church, which is the body of Christ, every member is required to promote the welfare of the rest. If the members of the body be inactive, and refuse to exert themselves, the vital frame decays; so, likewise, if there be no exertion amongst the followers of Christ, the mystical body, the church, languishes.

Finally, as an expression of love to Christ, you are under the strongest obligations thus to shew your love to the saints, by communion with them. Were the blessed Redeemer to make his appearance upon earth, as he once did, how would you manifest your love to him? Certainly, by personal attendance, and a desire after intercourse with him. Now, though Christ is not thus present with us in a bodily form, he is so by his church and people, who are his representatives. Whatever is done to them, he considers as done to himself. If therefore we have no desire after fellowship with them, as belonging to him, how can we prove that we have any real regard for him, or that we have communion with him? If you love not your brother whom you have seen, how can you prove to yourselves or to others, that you love God whom you have not seen?

When our blessed Lord is giving an account of the process of the last day, he dwells particularly upon the kind dispositions evidenced towards his people. *Come ye blessed of my Father, says he, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. I was a stranger and ye took me in, naked and ye clothed me; I was sick and ye visited me: I was in prison and ye came unto me.* These were acts of kindness, which they were conscious they had not done to him personally; but he declares that inasmuch as they had done them to the least of his followers they had done them to him.

Brethren, if these considerations will not impress your minds with a sense of the importance of christian communion, we know not what will. However you may differ in other respects, the name of Christian imposes upon you the strongest obligations thus to manifest your love to God, and to each other.

But let us consider the subject in another point of view, and endeavour to enumerate

Some of the Advantages attending Christian Communion.—And here, brethren, we hope to shew you, that in this as well as in other parts of the divine œconomy, the duty and privileges of the christian are most intimately connected. That there are difficulties in the way, arising from the imperfection of human nature, will not be denied. The painful experience of many of you, in your past intercourse with mankind, may perhaps make you insensible of the benefits which may hence be derived. But, if the inquiry should be made, whether the advantages of it do not much more than counter-

counterbalance the difficulties attending it, we need not hesitate what answer ought to be given. The testimony of the church, in all past ages, has been a standing proof of its excellency. Many have considered communion with the saints, next to communion with God himself, the most desirable of all blessings.

Let us consider it as *a means of gaining religious knowledge*. Public worship is certainly of very great importance. But of those who attend the ministry of the word, how few are there who appear to be profited by it! They are ever learning, but never come to the saving knowledge of the truth. They do not give themselves the trouble to think about religion, with any application to their own consciences, much less do they make it the subject of conversation in their social hours. What they hear produces no permanent effect upon their minds, but passes away as a tale that is told. Is not this too true a description of many hearers of the word? and need we wonder that they have so little acquaintance, even in theory, with the truths of christianity?

But to turn our attention to those who are beginning to be truly religious. Such persons have to struggle with many difficulties, especially if they have no serious acquaintance to encourage them, and to confirm their wavering purposes. As they are just emerging from the gloom of nature's darkness, all is strange and unaccountable to them. Though they discern a superior excellency in christianity, their ideas, on many religious subjects, are confused and indistinct. Their situation resembles that of the Ethiopian eunuch; though he had been at Jerusalem to worship, and was, as he travelled in his chariot, closely engaged in reading the scriptures; when the question was put to him, Understandest thou what thou readest? his answer was, How can I understand except some one teach me? Though God, in the conversion of a sinner, not only changes the heart, but also illuminates the mind, the progress of knowledge is gradual, and no proper means for the acquisition of it ought to be neglected. In that beautiful description of repenting sinners, which you find *Jer. l.* they are represented as asking the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward. Asking the way implies difficulty, and a consciousness of ignorance. They ask the way, therefore, not only of the ministers of the word, but of others who are travelling in the same direction. Those who are farther advanced in the christian life ought to seek out persons, who are thus upon the inquiry about religion, to endeavour to gain their confidence and affection, to drop a word of encouragement to them, by insensible degrees to lead them on, and to explain to them the way of God more perfectly.

Christian conference is one of the best means of acquiring religious knowledge; the mind is thus brought into proper exercise, its powers are strengthened, and its conceptions enlarged. Those who at first gave very imperfect accounts of religion, by hearing the sentiments of others, and endeavouring to explain their own, begin to think more closely, and more clearly. They are thus

enabled to give a reason of the hope that is in them with meekness and fear.

We would farther recommend *christian communion, as tending to promote the power of religion upon the mind.*

The communion of good men brings forth the graces of the Spirit into exercise. Under its auspicious influence, faith, hope, humility and meekness grow exceedingly. As it is founded upon love, so it greatly increases it. We insensibly feel our hearts more and more united to those with whom we hold social intercourse. The mind is thus stimulated to greater exertions, a holy emulation takes place; zeal for God inflames the soul; resolutions for holiness are formed; spiritual comfort and a blessed hope are enjoyed. The weak are strengthened, the desponding cheered, and the enlivened christian brings forth fruit with patience. The truth of what the wise man asserts has often been experienced, that, "as iron sharpeneth iron, so the countenance of a man his friend." Such is the nature of divine truths, and such the convincing power of the word, that we cannot speak of them seriously, without feeling our souls animated by them. "Did not our hearts burn within us," said the disciples to each other, in recollecting the unexpected interview which they had with the Saviour, "while he talked with us by the way, and opened the scriptures unto us?" A similar effect has often been produced by communion with the followers of Christ. As in a lighted fire, though small at first, the flame communicates from one combustible to another, and the heat of each particular part is increased by those in contact with it; so, by christian communion, the flame of divine love spreads from one heart to another; those who unite in it catch the fire, whilst secluded christians, like scattered embers, scarcely retain any degree of warmth.

If christian communion be a duty of divine obligation, we cannot, in the neglect of it, expect that our souls will prosper; we shall be barren and unfruitful in the work of the Lord. Many promises of God, relative to growth in grace, and improvement in religion, can only be applicable to persons united in society with each other. "Where two or three meet in my name, there am I in the midst of them, to bless them." "They that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God." If christian communion be properly attended to, you will not only find your knowledge increased, but it will ripen into wisdom, and, so far as it is reducible to practice, into experience. By comparing the effects divine truths produce on your own minds, with their operation on those of others, you will learn more of their nature and influence; you will get acquainted with the human heart, and thus, leaving the first principles, you will go on to perfection.

The influence of society, with respect to moral character, is evident wherever you cast your eyes. The man who keeps company with the notoriously wicked, either is so himself already, or will inevitably be contaminated with their vices; on the contrary,

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you cannot long unite with those who are eminent for humility, for piety towards God, and benevolence towards man, without admiring their excellencies, and desiring to be like them. In thus walking with wise men, you will yourselves become wise, while a companion of fools shall be destroyed.

No attainments in grace can render this communion unnecessary. As the young christian stands in need of it to acquire knowledge, and to gain experience, so it is equally necessary to the advanced christian, for maintaining that spirit which he has already imbibed, and improving those graces which have been formed in his soul. The best of men feel so much opposition from within and from without, that they want all the assistance that can be obtained, to answer this end. Christians are therefore frequently described as helpers of each other, and, if they are such, it must be in the discharge of those duties which imply fellowship and communion. Acting under the influence of such a disposition, we shall, to use the energetic expression of the apostle, *Consider one another, to provoke unto love and to good works.* We shall not suffer one another to sink into a supine, negligent state of mind. As fellow-travellers to Zion, the more vigorous will encourage the feeble, and will help forward such as are fainting by the way. In thus associating together, we shall beguile the tedious hours in this waste-howling wilderness, forget the difficulties of the way, and reach at Zion's Hill.

But to extend our views on the subject still farther, and to consider christian communion as *affecting the interests of religion in general, as a preservative against infidelity, and as tending to produce a revival of religion in the world.*

We live in a period when many are apostatizing from the faith, and, with the greatest boldness, denying not only the circumstantials, but the essential truths of christianity. The love of many waxeth cold. The standard of infidelity is openly exalted against the cross of Christ. Are these times when christians should sit down at their ease, regardless of the common cause, and the common danger? Shall the disciples of Jesus spend their strength in unchristian-like disputes, when the enemy is endeavouring, by open hostilities, and secret machinations, to overthrow the whole system? God forbid that this should be the case. Should we not strive together for the faith of the gospel, and maintain close union with each other, that we be not like sheep scattered here and there without a shepherd! Does it not become us not only to study the evidences of christianity, that we may be able to give a reason of the hope that is in us, but, for our own sakes, as well as to silence the cavils of infidels, to exemplify those tempers which christianity inspires.

The history of the church, through successive ages, awfully proves that religion has received its deepest wounds from the hands of its professed friends. It is enough to make us sit down and weep, when we reflect how often the church has been torn by internal

ternal dissensions, which have arisen about the most trifling matters; how often, on this account, the name of Christ has been blasphemed, and the cause of religion essentially injured! The most violent persecutions have been less prejudicial to christianity than the prevalence of such a disposition. When the infidel sees the professors of religion ready to bite and to devour each other, it confirms him in his aversion to religion itself; he infers, that their principles lead them to such a line of conduct. Do you wish, brethren, that this odium may be wiped away? Do you wish to put to silence the ignorance of foolish men? Do it not only by the force of argument, but by giving them a living proof of the superior excellence of christianity; shew them that it constrains you to love one another, and so to fulfil the law of Christ. Our blessed Lord, just before he took leave of his disciples, prayed, *that they all might be one, one in affection, one in heart, that the world, says he, may believe that thou hast sent me*; that, seeing the influence of christianity, they may be convinced of its truth and reality. While we thus, in communion with each other, feel its power on the mind, we shall not be suffered to cherish uncomfortable doubts respecting its reality, having the witness in ourselves, and seeing its efficacy in others. The world at large will be constrained to confess, that God is with us of a truth.

We beg your particular attention, dear brethren, to this part of our subject. You may not have an opportunity of examining minutely the evidences of christianity; you may not be capable of comprehending all the arguments that might be adduced to prove its truth, but, if you suitably improve the light you enjoy, and endeavour to act conformably to the divine precepts, relating to your duty to God and your fellow-christians, you will have such a persuasion of the reality and excellency of our holy religion, as must satisfy the mind, and arm you against the efforts of the enemies of your faith. This is a kind of evidence which does not call for the aid of learning or eloquence. It is evidence that speaks to the heart; the shafts of ridicule, or the sophistry of the wise, will make little impression on him who enjoys it. "Who shall harm you, if ye are thus followers of that which is good?"

Christianity met with great opposition when it was first propagated in the world. It had no temporal interest to support it. The teachers and professors of it were most of them plain, illiterate men. How did they silence the tongue of slander? How did they prove to the world its superior excellency? By the happy change it produced in them, and particularly by their love to and communion with one another. Their enemies were constrained to cry out, "Behold how these christians love one another!"

We lament the low state of religion amongst us, that the cause of Christ languishes in many places. We are ready to impute it to a variety of secondary causes. But are not we ourselves more implicated in the charge than we are ready to imagine? Is not the decay of christian communion amongst us one principal cause of it?

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When this communion is restored to its primitive simplicity, then, and not till then, may we hope to see a revival of religion. It is evident, that many professed christians attend one place of worship in preference to another, merely on account of what they hear from the pulpit; they have no attachment to the people themselves, and no desire to enjoy the benefits of communion with them. Need we to wonder, that, where this is the case, societies fluctuate, and often decline? If we feel no interest in a place, but because the minister pleases us, and are so little concerned about its prosperity, that we can leave it on slight occasions, the proper bond of union is wanting. We ought to manifest a disinterested concern for the welfare of Zion, more of the true spirit of christian communion, and under the influence of it we shall be stimulated, when affairs are discouraging, to be most constant in our attendance, most watchful over ourselves and others. It is particularly desirable, that those, whose experience and fervent piety qualify them for it, should exert themselves in this cause. It is the best, the most noble cause in which we can possibly engage. We address you seriously, as you value the interests of religion, and as you wish to see a revival of it in the world, dare not to neglect your duty. By social prayer, by affectionate exhortations, endeavour "to strengthen the things that remain, and are ready to die."

When the followers of Christ are scattered here and there, so that there is little or no connection between them, how is it likely, in the very nature of things, that their number should be increased? Zion then appears as though no man regarded her; she hangs her harp on the willows; she sits down disconsolate and forlorn; but when the spirit of christian communion is diffused, what encouragement is given to inquiring souls! They are constrained, while they behold your steadfastness and zeal, to say, "We will go with you, for we see that God is with you of a truth." Zion then travaileth, and bringeth forth children. Converts resort to the church, as doves to their windows. The accounts we have upon record, of remarkable revivals of religion in early and later periods, prove the truth of what is here asserted.

O God, where is thy zeal and thy strength? Wilt thou not appear for us as in former times? Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee? Wilt thou not unite our hearts to each other, that we may be united to thee in a perpetual covenant, never to be forgotten?—Surely the vows of God are upon us; let us humble ourselves before him; let us supplicate him, that he would be pleased to heal all our backslidings, and increase our attachment to his cause, and our love to one another.

Consider, further, the advantage of christian communion *in times of temptation*. The ways in which Satan tempts men are exceedingly diversified. Good men are sometimes tempted, through disbelief of what God has said, to gloominess and despondency of mind. It is the nature of temptations of this kind to prey upon the spirits, and to debilitate the mental powers; the danger is therefore greater
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of their gaining the ascendancy. Persons under the pressure of such painful sensations cannot summon up their powers. They are ready to despair of ever more seeing good in the land of the living, and to say, "My strength and my hope are perished from the Lord." At these seasons the christian can scarcely apply to himself the pathetic language of *David*, when in similar circumstances; "Why art thou cast down, O my soul, and why art thou disquieted within me, hope thou in God." He is not so able to judge of his own case as others; his mind is bewildered, it has lost its hold of heaven. How desirable, how necessary to him, thus deprived of the comfortable sense of God's presence, is the sympathetic condolence and tender attention of a friend, to remind him of his past experience, of the faithfulness of God, the promises of the gospel, the freeness and fulness of grace, to take up the impressive words of the Psalmist we before mentioned, and say unto him, "Why art thou cast down, O christian, hope in God, whatever Satan may suggest, thou art still an object of the divine favour.—The Lord will command his lovingkindness in the day time. Wait patiently for him, he will surely come, he will not tarry."

The falls and backslidings of good men are awful proofs of the power of temptation, and of the necessity of christian communion. We shall generally find that these took place, either when they had voluntarily withdrawn themselves from the society of God's saints, or when they were, from particular circumstances, prevented the enjoyment of it. Satan tempted our mother *Eve*, when alone, to taste the forbidden fruit. Can we suppose that *David*, that *Solomon*, that *Peter*, with others that might be named, would have fallen so dreadfully, if they had sought the friendly advice of those who were not at the time under the power of the same temptations? But it is the device of Satan, to sow dissension among the professors of religion, that he may the more effectually accomplish his purposes. Go ask the backslider how he was induced to commit a sin, the very thought of which would once have made him shudder with horror. Perhaps at first it was suggested to him, that there is no occasion for so much strictness; he begins to neglect opportunities for meeting with his religious connections, though not at first without some uneasiness; the company of those, to whom he before felt himself united by the strongest ties, is no longer desired; he feels himself like a stranger amongst them, has little or nothing to say, and even longs for the time of separation. He mixes with the world, where he meets with persons, who, by indirect hints and insinuations, are endeavouring to sap the foundations of virtue, and to expose religion to ridicule. Insensibly the temptation takes deeper root, the remonstrances of conscience are stifled, the avenues of redress are closed. At these seasons, when temptations thus present themselves to the mind, and are gradually relaxing its powers,—O for the warning, reproving voice of a friend, to snatch from danger, and save from ruin! Instead of trusting to our own strength, should we not say, "Let the righteous smite me, it

it shall be a kindness; let him reprove me, it shall be like excellent oil which shall not break my head."

Christian communion may also be considered as *pleasant in itself, as affording consolation in affliction, and in the prospect of death.*—We do not, we will not allow, that pleasure is only the attendant of the gay multitude; we maintain, on the contrary, that their fancied delights are all a delusion; but the communion of saints affords the most sublime and rational pleasures. *Behold how good and how pleasant it is, for brethren to dwell together in unity.* Friendship, thus cemented by religion, is the balm and the solace of life. It is the source of many delightful emotions in private, and renders public worship itself much more pleasant.

Trials and distresses are the common lot of man. We are all travelling in a vale of sorrows, and have each of us our respective burdens; but one christian was not designed to be independent of another. By the sympathy of others our burdens are alleviated; but affliction falls with redoubled weight upon him who is ready to say, like *Job*, "Lover and friend hast thou put far from me."—You cannot but recollect the remarkable words of the prophet *Malachi*, in a time of great discouragement, "Then they that feared the Lord spake often one to another, and the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written for them that feared the Lord, and thought upon his name." Go you and do likewise. This will be the most effectual way of fortifying the mind, amidst domestic trials, and public calamities.

Finally. Consider christian communion as a preparative for the heavenly world. It is not confined within the narrow bounds of mortal existence; it looks beyond death and the grave, to the period when it shall be ripened to perfection. With what composure, therefore, may the dying christian take leave of those, who, in this life, have been most endeared to him. 'I am about to be separated from you, but sorrow not as those that have no hope; we shall presently meet again, never more to part. I go to join the society of patriarchs, and prophets; I shall there see my friends who are gone before me, and there we shall wait for your arrival.' Such have often been the reflections of good men, in the prospect of death.

Our limits will not allow us to add what we intended respecting the means of promoting christian communion; but we hope, through the divine blessing, that the above hints may leave some suitable impressions on your minds.—God grant, that, sensible of your obligations to the duty we have been recommending, and encouraged by its beneficial tendency, you may cultivate it more and more.—May humility, meekness, charity, appear in all your conduct! Forake not the assembling of yourselves together, but exhort one another daily. Be of one mind, live in peace, and the God of love and peace shall be with you. Amen.

MINUTES.

MET at two o'clock on the Wednesday, as usual. A hymn being sung, Mr. COCKIN opened the service by solemn prayer, after which Mr. LITTLEWOOD preached, from *Isaiah xxxvii. 31. The remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward.* J. FAWCETT, jun. then read the letter he had prepared, which was approved, and ordered to be printed.

Met again at seven in the evening; J. FAWCETT, sen. being chosen Moderator, after singing and prayer, the letters were read from the several churches, and the service closed by Mr. ASHWORTH.

The concourse of people being pretty large on Thursday morning, Mr. COCKIN made an offer of his Meeting-house, which was accepted. The service was opened there by Mr. LANGDON, after which Mr. PILLING preached from *Jer. xxx. 7. It is the day of Jacob's trouble, but he shall be delivered out of it.* Then J. FAWCETT, sen. from *John xix. 30. He said, It is finished; and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.*

N. B. The Associated Ministers agreed on the following resolutions:

That the next Association be held at *Leeds*, on the Wednesday and Thursday in Whitfun-week.

That the subject of the next Circular Letter be *The Life of Faith*, and that Mr. LITTLEWOOD be appointed to prepare it.

That thanks be presented to Mr. COCKIN for the use of his Meeting-house, and other tokens of kindness on this occasion.

State of the churches, collected from the Letters sent by them to the Association.

Added,	{ On a profession of faith,-----	52	} 63
	{ By letters of recommendation,-----	6	
	{ Restored,-----	5	
Diminished,	{ By death,-----	12	} 32
	{ By dismission,-----	6	
	{ By exclusion,-----	14	
		Increase,	31

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This Letter is to be sold in the Congregations of the associated Churches at One Penny; but it will be inserted in the Theological Miscellany, with considerable Additions. At the Request of some Friends, who do not purchase that work, it will also be published at large in a separate Pamphlet, printed on superfine wove Paper.

